



# Alexandria Times

*Established in 1797 as The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### The George Washington Memorial Parkway

*Alexandria Times, January 16, 2020*

*Image: Site of the future George Washington Memorial Parkway in the 1930s. Office of Historic Alexandria.*

The grandiose dreams of Alexandria Treasurer M.R. Harlow in 1886 called for a roadway running from the Mall in Washington, across a bridge to Arlington then through Alexandria and parts of Fairfax County to Mt. Vernon. In response to enthusiastic local backing, the Virginia General Assembly chartered what was known as the Mt. Vernon Avenue Association in 1887, and the War Department surveyed routes.

The head of the survey was the Army's Peter Hains, who would soon supervise the dredging and filling of what would become the Tidal Basin, Potomac Park and the Lincoln Memorial site – thus giving his name to Hains Point. Around the turn of the 20th century, plans called for the highway to be “about 17 miles in length ... divided into sections, one for each state ... on which are to be built by the several states splendid permanent buildings with trees and flowers indigenous to each state.”

The highway was to accommodate automobiles, electric cars, carriages, bicycles and even horses along a bridle path. It would be “an Apian Way and a Westminster Abbey combined ... a speedway that will rival the boulevards of the world.”

An 1890 report to congress put the cost estimate of the highway between \$1.2 and \$2 million, a cost that Sen. Leland Stanford of California thought was appropriate, saying, “No matter what it cost, the American people can never do too much to honor the name of Washington.” Despite the grand plans, actual construction plans languished for years.

Movement started with the construction of the Arlington Memorial Bridge in the early 1900s, which linked the area to Washington, D.C. across the river. The impending arrival of Washington's 200th birthday spurred congress to authorize the parkway in May 1928.

Designed and constructed by the Bureau of Public Roads in the Agriculture Department, the parkway would later come under the National Park Service. The design from the 1920s called for paving the section through Alexandria with brick, and from the never-built memorial circle in the southern end of Alexandria near present-day Hunting Towers to Mt. Vernon would be concrete.

While the dream and the reality of the parkway don't completely match, the proponents' goal was of a road that “would provide a pastoral, inspirational, and patriotic automobile route to Mt. Vernon,” creating a “contemplative mood to encourage reflection on George Washington and his significance to our nation.” Whether the project was “one of the most patriotic ever suggested,” the parkway has “afforded endless pleasure” to many of the people who have driven it.



*“Out of the Attic” is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as “Marking Time” and explored Alexandria's history through collection items, historical*



## **Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia**

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*images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into “Out of the Attic” and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.*

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